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Exploration and Discovery.

DR. E. J. BANKS, Field Director of the Expedition (Babylonian Section) of the Oriental Exploration Fund of the University of Chicago, has reported that the excavations at Bismya began on December 25, 1903, and that they are now proceeding to his full satisfaction. With the commissioner, one servant, and a consular kavass, Dr. Banks left Bagdad by carriage for Hilleh on December 11. December 13, in company with Koldewey, he spent examining excavations at Babylon, and on the following day he visited Birs Nimrud. The party reached Diwanieh on December 15, and presented their letter to the muttessarif. No obstacles were placed in their way, and the authorities claimed that it would be unnecessary to take a large guard to Bismya. With two mounted and four foot-soldiers, and four workmen from Diwanieh, the party started for Bismya on December 17, and on the second day reached the village of Segban, the sheikh of the El-Bedin Arabs in whose territory Bismya is located. They were received hospitably by the chief, and on the following day Dr. Banks, with about twenty horsemen, spent a few hours at the ruin, which is three hours from the village. It was the intention of the Field Director to begin the excavations with about forty men, but, on account of the numerous Montefik Arabs who had wandered north to escape the fighting about Nasarieh, the country is unsafe. Segban, who has been informed by the Turkish authorities that he will be held responsible for the safety of the party, was cautious and insisted that it would be unwise to remain at Bismya with less than sixty armed workmen. On December 22 men were placed at work upon two wells in what Dr. Banks believes to be the bed of the old canal Shat en-Nil, and also of a later stream which dried up at the breaking of the Hindieh dam. At the end of the second day one of the wells reached a depth of ten meters, when the dry sand suddenly caved in, nearly burying the workmen, and they were forced to abandon this well. On December 24 work was begun on two more wells, and on the 25th, as he was arranging to send to Hai for some water-skins and to establish a water caravan of several donkeys, the workmen announced that the sand seemed moist, and at nine o'clock on Christmas morning—the best Christmas gift possible—water sprang up through a hole made by a workman's pick, and the

water was sweet. There was great excitement among the workmen; they ran about the well dancing, singing, and swinging their baskets in the air. The Field Director was no less pleased than they, and he ordered a sheep to be sacrificed for their baksheesh. A third well progressed slowly. On December 28 water was also found in it. Thus one of the difficulties which have kept excavators from Bismya is settled, and there is every indication that the water will suffice for every season of the year.

Bismya is a very large ruin, only Nippur, Warka, and perhaps Babylon surpassing it in extent. Its height does not exceed twelve meters, but it is considerably higher than Telloh, Fara, and other ruins where excavations have been successfully made. The length of the entire group of mounds, including a small low hill two hundred meters or so to the northwest, is 1,695 meters; the width is 840 meters. In a general way, the ruins form a rough oblong square. The square may be described as consisting of two parts, separated by a valley running east and west. The northern part, which is by far the larger, is lined on its western edge by nearly a dozen high circular mounds, as if representing so many buildings apparently overlooking the canal. The hill gradually slopes away to the east, which Dr. Banks believes to be the old necropolis. The southern part is not extensive. Its highest hills are in the southwest corner. Dr. Banks is of the opinion that the mound has not been inhabited since Babylonian times. There are no walls visible above the surface; the few heaps of brick which the Arabs have collected have been mistaken for walls. The surface of the mound is smooth, and has not been dug over by the Arab antiquity hunters, as have been most other Babylonian ruins, for Bismya is so far from water, and in so dangerous a locality, that a single man, or a small company of men, could remain there for only a few hours at a time.

Already a village has sprung up at Bismya. Scattered about the Field Director's tent are thirty houses with women and children; three shops, a carpenter, and a butcher; and even a street dog has found its way there. It is understood that after the workmen receive their pay a great many more families will arrive.

Excavations are proceeding with a force of one hundred men. As yet only the surface has been scratched, and in no place have they gone to a greater depth than two meters; but wherever they dig they come upon some wall or tomb. The men, some of whom have worked in every ruin in Babylonia, agree that Bismya is by far the richest and the easiest to excavate. The results which are so rapidly coming in are evidence of this.

The Arabs have given the Field Director much trouble. There seems to be a dispute about the ownership of the site of Bismya, and the following letters have passed between the Field Director and the sheikh of the Montefik :

LETTER RECEIVED FROM ABDUL RAZAK, SHEIKH OF THE MONTEFIK.

MR. BANKS, *American* :

We have learned that you are digging in the limits of our property and are bringing from the ground many things. Although, according to the regulations and the law, no one may touch the land of another without the consent of the owner, yet the land which you now inhabit is actually included in the limits of our property, of which we have in our hands the title deeds describing the limits. Since you have come to live in this district without our consent and without obtaining our permission, you are doing business and spending money with other people who have neither power nor right in this district, and who can afford you no protection. Moreover, as you are to spend a large sum of money, it should be with us as the original owners of this land. Now, as you have knowledge of this entire matter, it is for you to judge what is proper.

(Signed) ABDUL RAZAK IBN FEHAD PASHA.

REPLY TO THE LETTER OF ABDUL RAZAK.

To the most honorable Abdul Razak, Bey :

SIR : We have received your kind letter of the 21st in which you inform us that the land of Bismya belongs to you, and is included within your territory according to your deed. Until the present time we have been ignorant of this, and, moreover, Sheikh Segban, sheikh of the El Bedin, to whom the Ottoman government, through the mutessarif of Diwanieh, has recommended us by letter, also asserts that he is the sheikh of this territory, and that no one else has a right to interfere with it.

Consequently we beg you to send us your papers, that we may study them and judge who is in the right. However, if you wish, you may also write to Sheikh Segban in order to settle the matter with him.

(Signed) Field Director of the Excavations at Bismya,

Dr. BANKS, *American*.

Bismya is an exceedingly rich ruin, and there is not a yard of it without something of interest. The excavations have already demonstrated what the ruins contain, and if funds were available to employ several hundred workmen, not only would the security, which just at present is very uncertain, be perfect, but the entire ruin could be satisfactorily excavated before the expiration of the irade. The expense of the staff, which is by far the larger part, would not be materially increased.

ROBERT FRANCIS HARPER,

Director.

March 16, 1904.